

Using Visible Thinking Routines in the Language Classroom

Recently, visible thinking practice has gained popularity as a valuable classroom tool for maximizing student engagement, promoting critical thinking, and increasing collaboration.

Developed by Project Zero at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, these highly flexible conceptual protocols often require little teacher preparation while yielding rich learning opportunities across age groups.

In this webinar, we will examine several visible thinking routines that can enrich communicative dynamics, stimulate productive engagement, and foster insightful student expression in the ELT classroom.



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Stephanie Bolaños



Stephanie is originally from Costa Rica. Growing up in San Francisco, California, and engaging with its rich diversity, she acquired an early interest in language and culture which ultimately led to her obtaining an M.A. in TESOL at San Francisco State University.

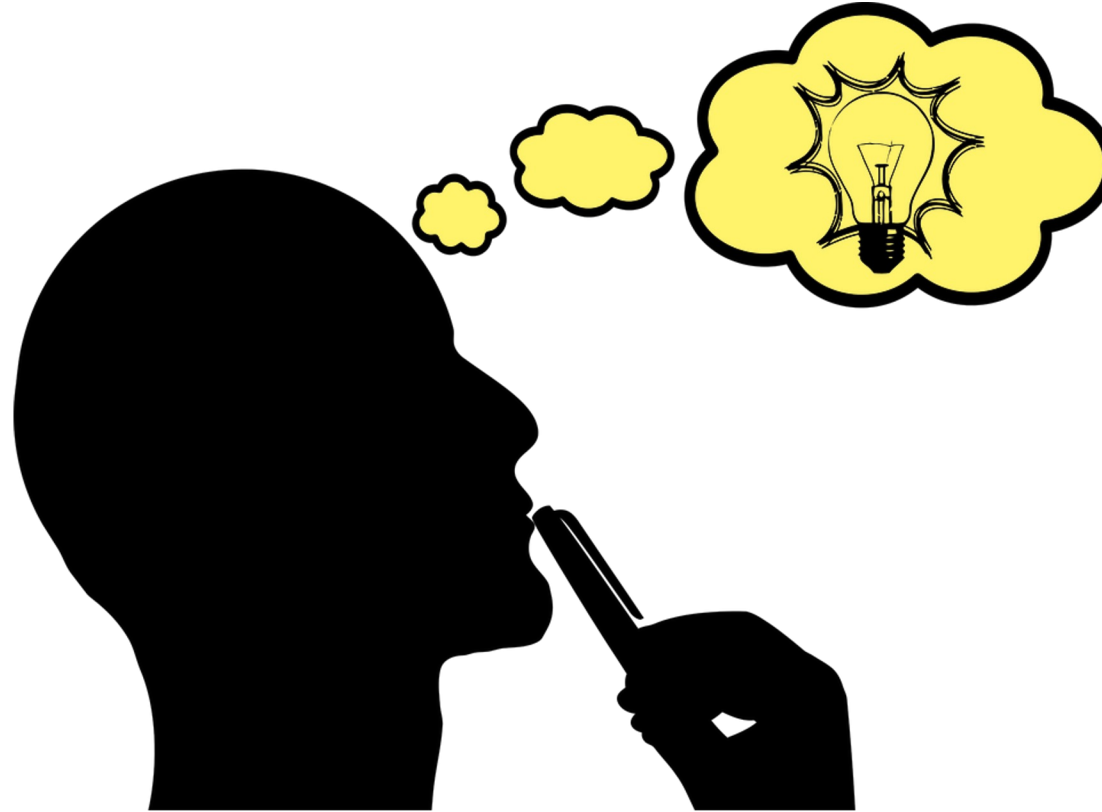
During her career, she has traveled between California and Costa Rica teaching ESL literacy, English for Academic Purposes, and English for Specific Purposes. Currently, she is an ESL instructor at Castro Valley Adult and Career Education. She spends her free time cheering for the San Francisco 49ers (an American football team) and thoroughly spoiling a French bulldog named Max.



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Using Visible Thinking Routines In the Language Classroom



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***Better than one
thousand years of
diligent study is one day
with a great teacher.***

What thoughts come to mind
about the learning process as
you consider this proverb?

Write your response in the
chat.

Agenda

Today we will:

- Examine the Background of Visible Thinking
- Identify Its Key Features
- Explore a Selection of Routines



Visible Thinking: Background

- Project Zero - Harvard Graduate School of Education - 1967
- Dedicated to research on education topics, including Visible Thinking
- Led to the publication of two books
 - *Making Thinking Visible* (2011)
 - *The Power of Making Thinking Visible* (2020)

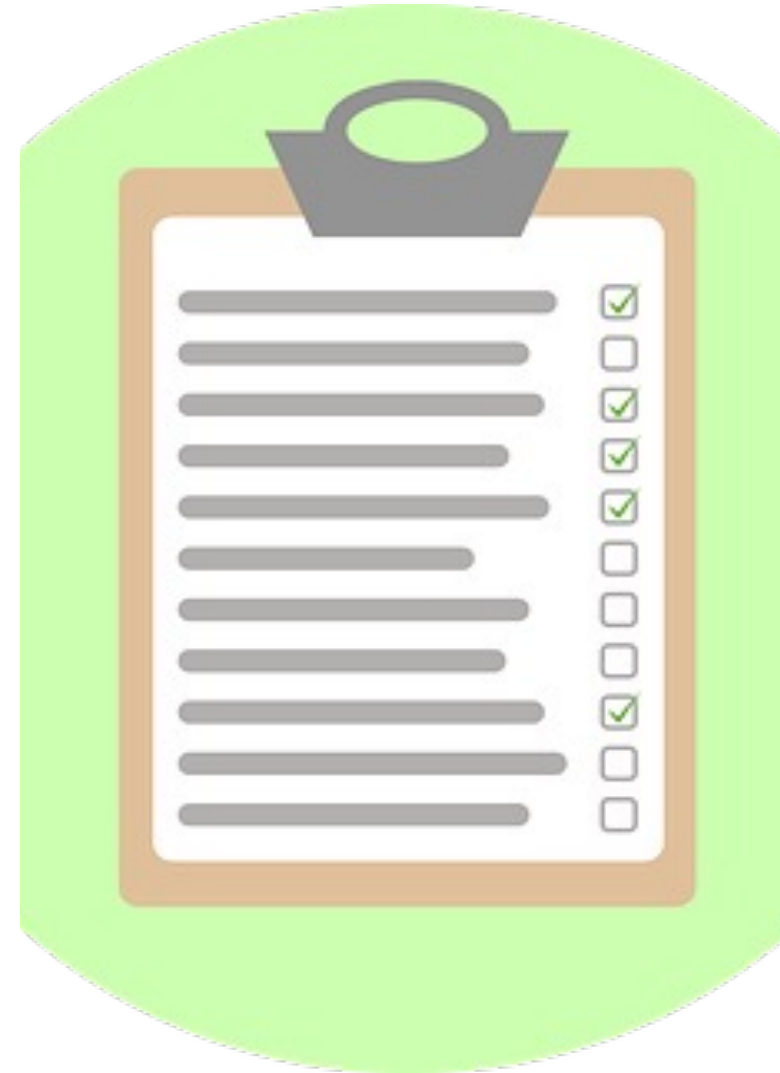
Visible Thinking Routines: Key Features

- Consists of simple sets of questions / steps
- Scaffolds student thinking for deeper exploration
- Reveals students' thinking to the teacher and raises students' awareness of their thinking



Sample Visible Thinking Routines

- **Beginning / Middle / End**
- **The Four Cs**
- **Think / Puzzle / Explore**
- **The Three Whys**
- **Word / Phrase / Sentence**



Visible Thinking Routine Basics

- Variety of routines can be used at the beginning, middle, or end of a lesson.
- Best if introduced gradually.
- Best if used regularly for greater familiarity and productivity.
- Valuable for reinforcing language functions (stating an opinion, agreeing/disagreeing, asking clarifying questions).
- Benefits students by promoting a collaborative atmosphere.
- Adaptable model for various classroom contexts.



Beginning, Middle, End

A routine for
harnessing the power
of storytelling to
observe connections,
patterns, & meaning.

Sample Task: Beginning, Middle, End

If this image is the beginning of a story, what might happen next?

If the image is the middle of a story, what happened before?
What might be about to happen?

If this image is the end of the story, what might be the conclusion?



Sample Responses: Beginning, Middle, End



It is the middle of the story.
The man was tired of his ugly
life and left it behind.

In this picture, he finds a
strange new world full of
beautiful happy robots.

But will he stay with the robots
forever or return to reality? He
must choose.



Your Turn!



(B) If this image is the **b**eginning of a story, what might happen next?

(M) If the image is the **m**iddle of a story, what happened before? What might be about to happen?

(E) If this image is the **e**nd of the story, what might the story be?

**Pick one to share in the chat.
Please include **B/M/E** in your
response**

Classroom Guidelines: Beginning, Middle, End

- Show a thought-provoking image.
- Ask students these three questions:
 - 1.If this image is the beginning of a story, what might happen next?
 - 2.If the image is the middle of a story, what happened before?
What might be about to happen?
 - 3.If this image is the end of the story, what might be the conclusion?
- Students do a freewriting exercise with their responses and then share in small groups.
- Possible follow-up activity: a short story writing assignment.

Teaching Tip: Beginning, Middle, End

Ask students to
identify key
supporting
details.



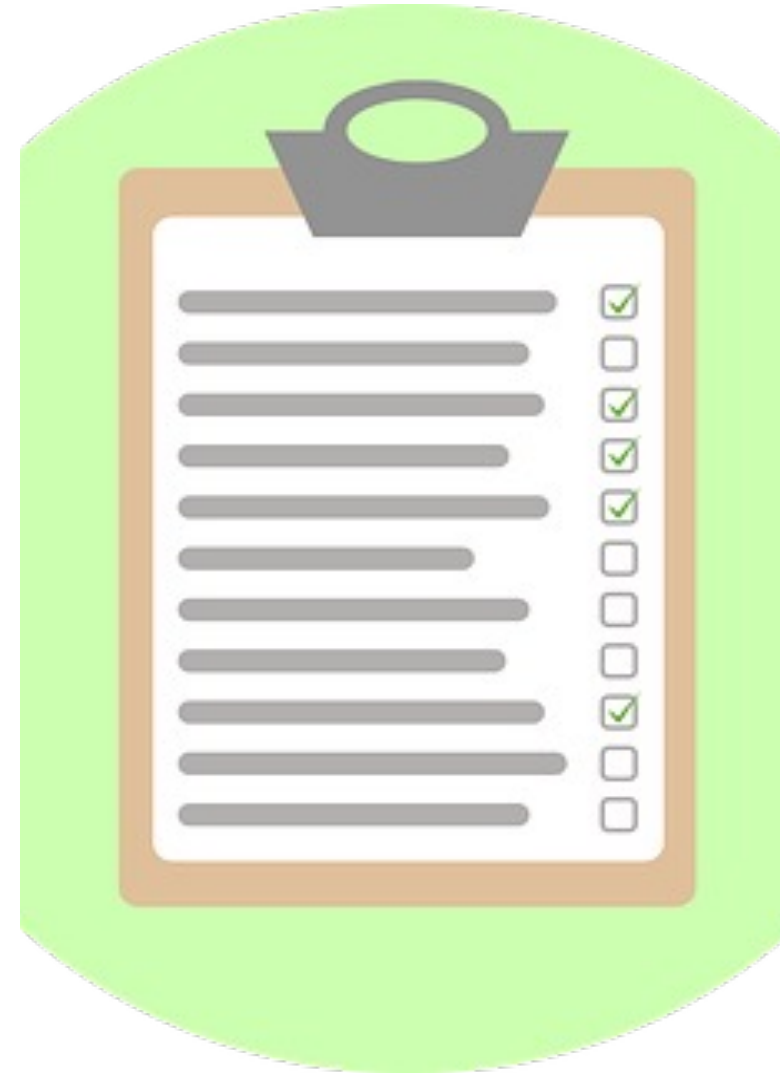
Sample Visible Thinking Routines

- Beginning / Middle / End



- **The Four Cs**

- Think / Puzzle / Explore
- The Three Whys
- Word / Phrase / Sentence





The Four Cs

A routine for structuring a text-based discussion by examining:

- Connections
- Challenges
- Concepts
- Change

Sample Topic: Qualities of a True Friend

- Trustworthy
- Dependable
- Funny
- Kind
- Confident

What connections do you draw between the list and your own life?

What ideas do you want to challenge?

What key concepts do you think are worth holding on to?

What changes in thinking might you consider either for you or others?

Sample Responses: Qualities of a True Friend

- Trustworthy
- Dependable
- Funny
- Kind
- Confident

Connection: I have the best friend in the world. She is my sister and she is all these things.

Challenge: I don't understand why 'funny' on the list.

Concept: Kindness really is most important. When a person is kind, they probably have many other good qualities.

Change: I never thought about confidence and friendship, but it's true. If you are confident, you can help others feel confident too. That's a true friend.



Your Turn!

Characteristics of a Good Teacher

- Enthusiastic
- Creative
- Humorous
- Challenges Students
- Encouraging/Patient
- Admits what they don't know



Consider the list on the left.

- **What connections can you make to your own life as a teacher?**
- What ideas do you want to challenge?
- What key concept or idea do you want to hold on to?
- What changes in attitude / action are suggested?

Share your ideas in the chat.

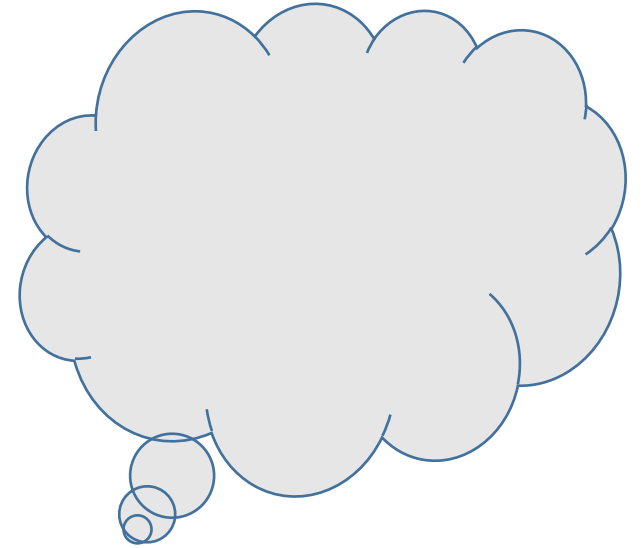
Classroom Guidelines: The Four Cs

Useful following the reading of a text.

- Give students the instructional material (poem, short story, article, essay).
- Present these four questions: (or just 2-3, if time is limited)
 - What connections do you draw between the text and your own life?
 - What ideas do you want to challenge?
 - What key concepts do you think are worth holding on to?
 - What changes in thinking might you consider either for you or others?
- Ask students to mark passages from text that correspond to each.
- Students share in groups / comment / ask questions.
- Possible follow-up task: Ask students to write a journal entry summarizing what they learned from the discussion.

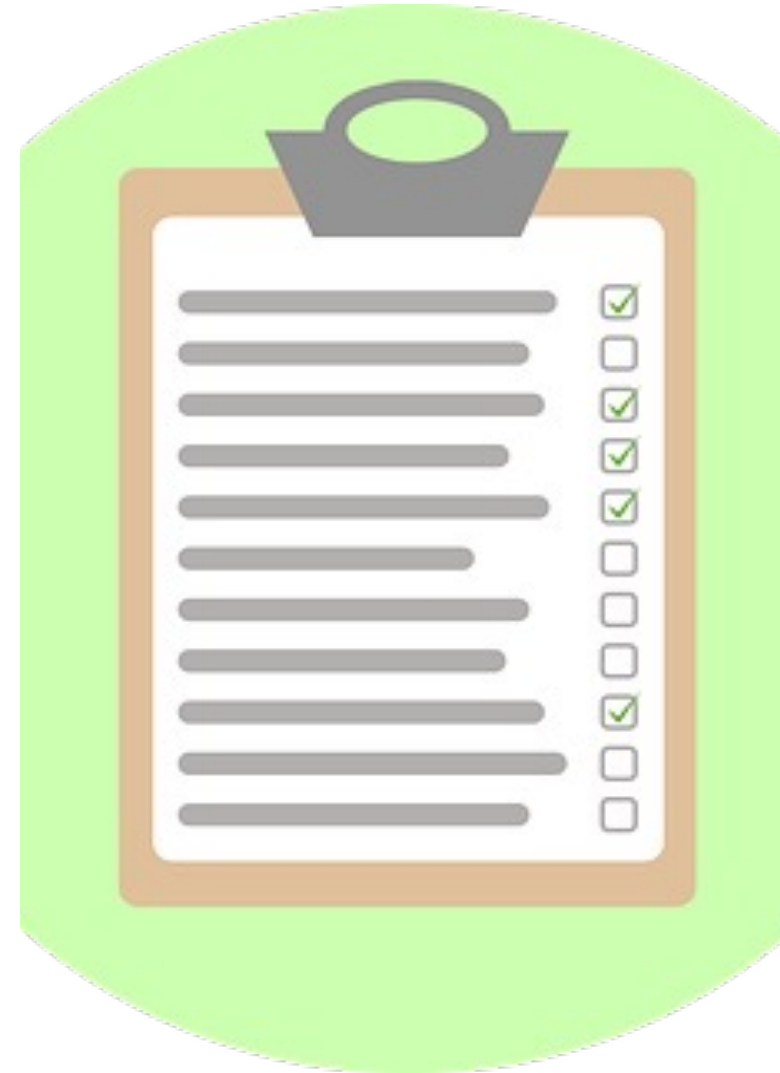
Teaching Tips: The Four Cs

- With longer texts, best to give students time outside of class to read.
- Give students time to identify passages from the text to support their responses.
- Students share in groups by taking one “C” at a time.



Sample Visible Thinking Routines

- Beginning / Middle / End
- The Four Cs
- ★ • **Think / Puzzle / Explore**
- The Three Whys
- Word / Phrase / Sentence



Think, Puzzle, Explore

A routine that sets the stage for deeper inquiry.



Sample Topic: Defining Success

“Don’t compare yourself with anyone in this world. If you do so, you are insulting yourself.” – Bill Gates

What thoughts come to mind as you read the quote?

What questions does it raise – or what puzzles you about the quote?

What ideas come to mind for further exploration?

Sample Responses: Defining Success

“Don’t compare yourself with anyone in this world. If you do so, you are insulting yourself.” – Bill Gates

THINK: Bill Gates understands that no two people are the same and this is a beautiful thing.

PUZZLE: But is it bad to compare yourself to a person you admire, like my mentor?

EXPLORE: So how can you admire someone and want to be like them but still be you?



Your Turn!

“No significant learning can take place
without significant relationship.”

-- Dr. James Comer, Yale Child Study Center

What thoughts come
to mind as you read
the quote?

What questions
does the quote raise
– or what puzzles
you about it?

What ideas come
to mind for further
exploration?

Answer the question in the chat.

Classroom Guidelines: Think, Puzzle, Explore

Good for introducing a new topic or theme by preparing students for a close read.

- Give students time to view the instructional material (quote, text, video).
- Pose these three questions:
 - What thoughts come to mind -- what's your initial reaction?
 - What questions come to mind -- what puzzles you?
 - What ideas come to mind for further exploration?
- Give students time to think and write their responses.
- Students share / comment / ask questions in groups.
- Possible follow-up activity: Students summarize their ideas on poster paper to display in the room.

Tip for Online Adaptation

Padlet

- Virtual bulletin board
- Teacher / students can collaborate on a common prompt or question

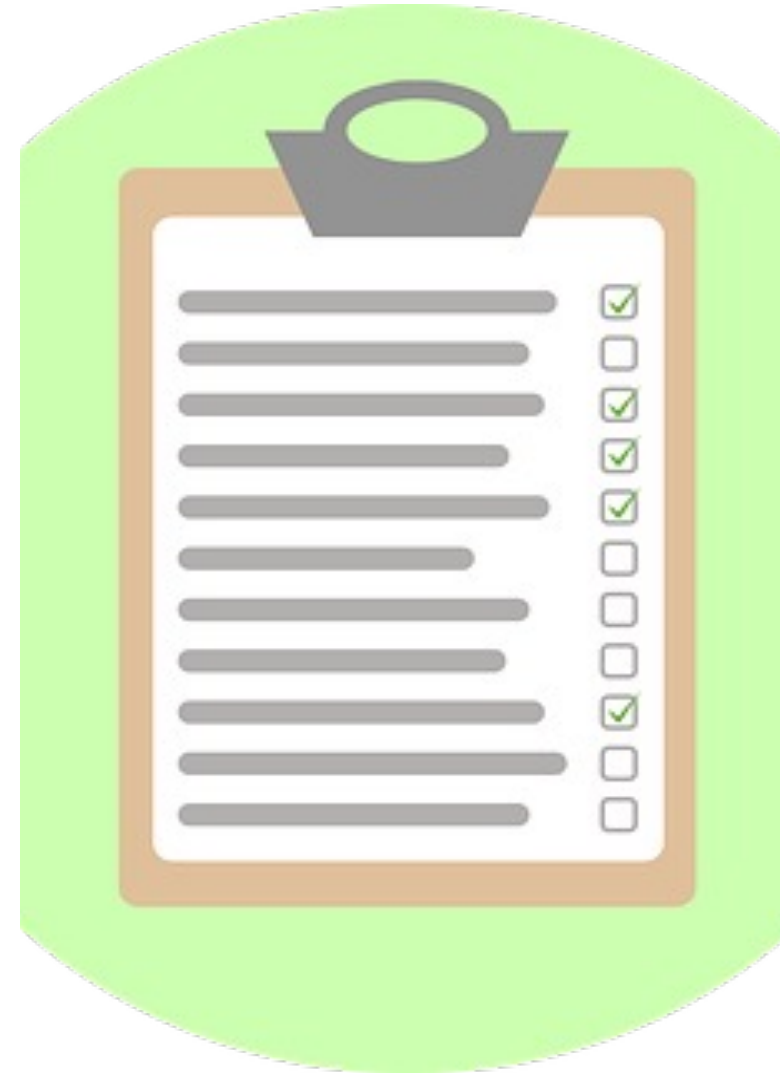
Reflection Question



How might you adapt this routine for your own classroom?

Sample Visible Thinking Routines

- Beginning / Middle / End
- The Four Cs
- Think / Puzzle / Explore
- ★ • **The Three Whys**
- Word / Phrase / Sentence



The Three Whys

A routine that encourages students to consider personal, local, and global significance.



Student Poem: “Education is Like a Fire”

Education is like a fire
A fire that grows beyond
With flames that reach higher, and
A fire that never burns out, but just
grows
It is the key to unlock the golden door
freedom
The more we want to
The more will come to know
And it is not all about reading
It is about how you see the world

You are the mother of all professions
The pillar of life
The savior of mankind
The ladder that takes us to imaginary
heights
Without you, we are nothing only mere
mortals
And shaping our personality is the
motto
I want to thank you for your greatness
Because of you, I have a future, which is
bright and clear. -- Serone, Access South Africa

The Three Whys

Think about the poem and reflect on the three questions that will be posed to you.



The Three Whys

- Why might the message of this poem matter to me personally?



The Three Whys

- Why might the message of this poem matter to the people around me? (family, friends, community, city)



The Three Whys

- Why might the message of this poem matter to the world?

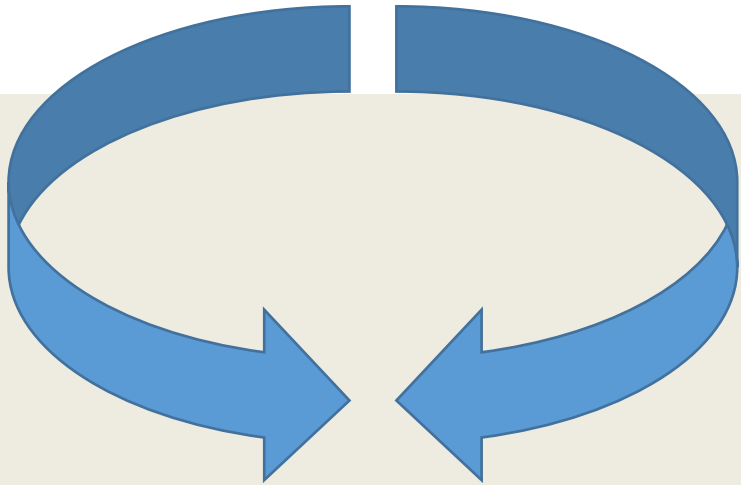


Classroom Guidelines: The Three Whys

Good for concluding a lesson by encouraging students to expand their perspectives on a topic.

- Allow students time to review instructional material.
- Pose questions one step at a time, allowing students time to respond after each question before continuing with the next question.
- Students share / comment / ask questions in groups.
- Possible follow-up: Ask students to write a paragraph summarizing their thoughts on the topic.

Teaching Tip: The Three Whys

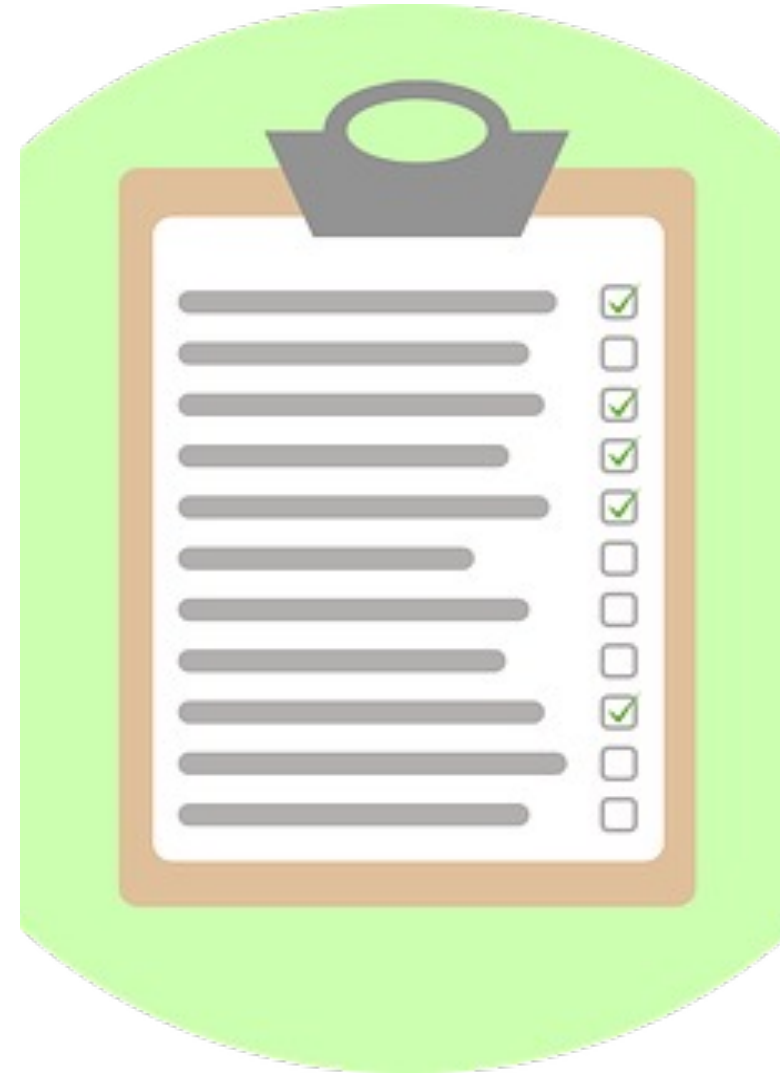


Order may be reversed.

Sample Visible Thinking Routines

- Beginning / Middle / End
- The Four Cs
- Think / Puzzle / Explore
- The Three Whys

★ • **Word / Phrase / Sentence**



"Patrick, I know you're hurrying . . . but please, go a little faster if you can. Please?"

Dr. Lewis Gamache was waiting for us at the hospital.

"Hi there, Mom." He squinted from behind silver-framed bifocals. I had found him months before in the village of Chappaqua. He was a general practitioner who specialized in obstetrics, and I trusted him more than the far more famous doctors who had offered their services in New York.

"Hello, Lewis. I feel kind of shitty." I tried to smile, but I was going to faint.

"That's fine. It means you're almost there." He led me to a wheelchair, and I was taken inside.

Almost there, indeed! At eleven o'clock that night two nurses in white tunics sped me down bright hospital corridors to the operating room. My body was soaked with sweat. My hair was matted and looked almost brown. It was clammy and cold. The pain was unbearable, twice as bad as I remembered when I was having Jennie.

Dr. Gamache was waiting in the operating room. He was his usual wide-eyed and enthusiastic self.

"Hello, Maggie. What took you so long?"

"Ooohh." I shut my eyes. The contraction came again. "I was having too much fun in bed."

"Let's rock and roll," he said. "Not the joke, but I can't laugh."

At 11:19 in the morning, Dr. Gamache said to me, "Maggie, you've got yourself a little boy," and laid the baby beside me so I could look at him. He seemed to be yawning. *Bored already with planet Earth?* But he was such a beauty.

He received the classic rear-end slap, rather than the foot flick. I could hear his thin, barely perceptible cry.

"I don't think he's got your lungs," Dr. Gamache said. "Nurse, put the baby on the table warmer, please."

"His name is Allen," I said, and promptly passed out.

PATRICK NEARLY FLEW into my hospital room. He was beaming. He hurried to my bed, and we kissed. He was Paul Newman, and Spencer Tracy — all wrapped in one. He really was so wonderful: thoughtful, compassionate, tender, caring. Patrick wanted to marry me — he'd already asked, but something about "marriage," and my experience with Phillip, had made me ask him to wait. Patrick said that he understood. I hoped he did. I also hoped he would ask again — soon.

Something crunched in his sport jacket pocket as he hugged me. Curious, I reached inside.

"You've gone too far this time, buster," I said and smiled and rolled my eyes. "Cigars? How corny can you get?"

"I'm a corny guy." Patrick shrugged. "The cigars are for my friends. I bought Irish whiskey for the unwed father."

"Did you see Allie yet?"

"You bet. The testicles on him. Bigger than his feet. I'm so impressed."

I laughed. "That would interest you."

"I thought it might interest his mother just a little."

"To know that her son is well equipped for the world."

Word / Phrase / Sentence

A routine for capturing the essence of a text.

Sample Task: *I Am Malala*

Malala Yousafzai is the world's youngest winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, awarded to her at only age 17 for her work as an education activist for women.

Her autobiography, *I Am Malala*, includes memories of her childhood in Pakistan, where she grew up in a loving family and in a richly stimulating home where education was highly valued.



Prompt for Word / Phrase / Sentence

Select a word
that captured your
attention or struck
you as powerful.

Select a phrase
that moved, engaged,
or provoked you.

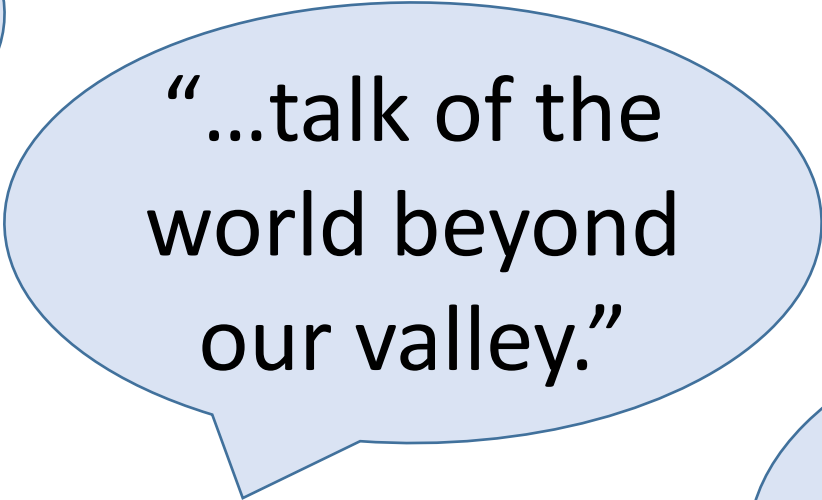
Select a sentence
that was meaningful
to you.

Sample Student Responses

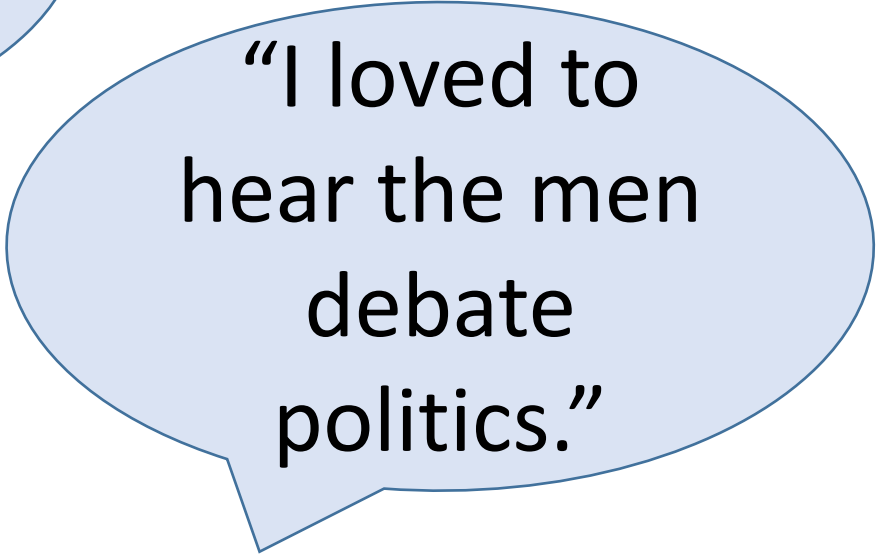
I Am Malala: Word / Phrase / Sentence

A light blue speech bubble with a dark blue outline and a small tail pointing towards the bottom left.

“hypnotized”

A light blue speech bubble with a dark blue outline and a small tail pointing towards the bottom left.

“...talk of the
world beyond
our valley.”

A light blue speech bubble with a dark blue outline and a small tail pointing towards the bottom left.

“I loved to
hear the men
debate
politics.”



Reflection Question:

What might be the benefits of using Word / Phrase / Sentence with your students?



Now you try it



We will read a short excerpt from “For Life’s Sake” by Linda Hogan.

You will select a word, a phrase, and a sentence that captures the heart of the text.

“For Life’s Sake” – Linda Hogan

Looking back, I can say that I was a poet by heart; I didn’t need words at first. I was an observer. I only grew into a writing life. My work was, and still is, a way of being in the world. It is an acknowledgment that we live in a sentient world. With my work, I try to see the world whole again... I also know the importance of the tiniest root of a plant, that it contributes to our world. My writing is larger than I am. It comes from some other place I can’t name. I am grateful for it. In it there are the undercurrents of earth, waves of ocean, discoveries unknown to me... But most importantly, I have had to learn how to wait, listen, and follow... I’ve had to learn, as now, sitting under a tree, for the work to reveal itself, to come to me.

Classroom Guidelines:

Word / Phrase / Sentence

- Give students time to read the selected text in advance.
- Students select a word / a phrase / a sentence that seems particularly meaningful.
- Students share / comment / ask questions in groups.
- Possible follow-up activity: Students record responses as a journal entry or create a poster to share with the class.

Teaching Tips: Word / Phrase / Sentence

- Use Jamboard as an online option.
- Encourage students to annotate the text.
- Order can be reversed.



Putting It All Together

Consider the examples that we've explored.

Which one might you use with your students and why?

Share your ideas in the chat.

- **Beginning / Middle / End**
- **The Four Cs**
- **Think / Puzzle / Explore**
- **The Three Whys**
- **Word / Phrase / Sentence**

One Final Thought...

“Take risks in your teaching. Most of all, have confidence in every learner’s ability to think and your capacity to nurture that thinking. The results will amaze and energize you.”

-- Ron Ritchhart, Project Zero

References

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Thank you!

Questions or concerns?

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Reflection Questions

1. Which of the Visual Thinking Strategies we discussed today would you introduce first to your students? How does it connect to a need in your curriculum?
2. What are some benefits of introducing short, explicit routines for thinking about / analyzing academic situations like engaging with a text? How might you reinforce these strategies after you first introduce them so they become more automatic for students over time?
3. Which was your favorite Visual Thinking Strategy? Why? Which might your students benefit from or enjoy the most? Why?



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